

Rep. Baird Works to Ensure Public Understands Proposed Casino Application Process (October 27, 2005)

Washington, D.C. - Congressman Brian Baird today took another step in his ongoing effort to ensure the Cowlitz Tribe's gaming application process is open, transparent, and understandable for Southwest Washington residents.

In response to the multitude of calls and concerns from confused Southwest Washington residents he has received in recent weeks, Congressman Baird sent the following letter to Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton. The letter urges the Secretary to immediately:

- 1. Arrange a public meeting to clear up public confusion over the application process
- 2. Appoint an ombudsman to arrange the meeting and answer the public's questions
- 3. Delay any recommendations until after the public meeting has been held and public confusion has been cleared up

October 27, 2005

Gale Norton

Secretary

U.S. Department of Interior

1849 C Street, NW

Washington, D.C. 20410

Dear Secretary Norton:

As you are aware, the Cowlitz Tribe has submitted applications to the federal government to construct a casino on property in La Center, Washington. Unfortunately, in recent weeks, it has become increasingly apparent there is much confusion in Southwest Washington over the process governing the approval of these applications and the responsibilities of the many federal agencies and entities with a role in this process. My office has been inundated with phone calls and letters from constituents with questions about the process and seeking information on the status of the Cowlitz Tribe's applications. Some of my constituents have reported difficulty in obtaining complete and accurate information from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. I have also been made aware of inconsistencies in the information provided by the local Bureau of Indian Affairs office and information provided by the federal offices.

In an effort to clarify these inconsistencies and provide the residents of Southwest Washington with the complete and accurate information they deserve, I request that you immediately arrange a public meeting in the region. To ensure the information provided is as comprehensive as possible, I ask you to guarantee that representatives from all federal agencies with a role in this process including the Washington, D.C. Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Indian

Affairs Northwest Regional Office, the Office of the Solicitor at the Department of Interior, the National Indian Gaming Commission, and the Office of Indian Gaming Management ĩġ½ are present at the meeting to provide information and answer questions.

In addition, I respectfully request that you appoint an ombudsman at the Department of Interior who can serve as the single point of contact for information pertaining to the Cowlitz Tribeġ½s applications and the process governing the consideration of these applications. This person should be able to provide comprehensive information on process and timelines and be responsible for providing answers to any specific questions as they arise. In addition, it is my hope that this ombudsman will also be responsible for receiving input, comments and information from residents in Southwest Washington and making certain that any input, comment or information is shared with the appropriate people within the federal government for prompt consideration.

In the last couple of weeks, I have learned that a recommendation on the tribeġ½s fee-to-trust application may be forthcoming from the Bureau of Indian Affairs Northwest Regional Office to the Washington, D.C. office. I have also recently learned that a recommendation from the National Indian Gaming Commission to the Department of Interior on the tribeġ½s restored lands application will occur by the end of November.

I understand that both of these are simply recommendations and that the final decision on both of these applications is the responsibility of the national office. I also understand that no final decisions are expected on these pending applications in the near future. However, because I am committed to ensuring that this entire process is as open and transparent as possible, I respectfully request that no recommendation and/or decision be made on any of the Cowlitz Tribeġ½s pending applications until at least 30 days after the requested public meeting is held in Southwest Washington with all of the relevant federal agencies.

Due to the urgency of this issue, I look forward to your response as soon as possible. I also wish to express my commitment to continuing to work with you to ensure that this process is as open and transparent as possible. If you have any questions or need any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at (202) 225-3536.

Sincerely,

Brian Baird

Member of Congress

cc:

W. Patrick Ragsdale, Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs
Stan Speaks, Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Northwest Regional Office
Sue Ellen Wooldridge, Solicitor, U.S. Department of Interior
Phillip Hogen, Chairman, National Indian Gaming Commission
George Skibine, Director, Office of Indian Gaming Management

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